THE UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

SEPTEMBER, 1988

OUR LIVES: A DECADE AFTER DANCER FROM THE DANCE

GROUND ZERO by Andrew Holleran
(William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1988)

(A review by Rev. Steve Carson)

"Ground Zero" is the place the bomb goes off. I look again at the cover: three men, evoking memories of Hiroshima. One looking up, at the flash that will change that city, and history, forever. One about to become a shadow of himself on the ground. That's what happened to the Japanese-- it happened so quickly, a shadow was all that remained. And one other gay man. He's holding an umbrella. I get it. He's protecting himself, from the flash that will destroy his world, and ours, forever.

In Dancer from the Dance, Andrew Holleran chronicled New York in 1978. This was for many of us the first great gay disco novel. A decade later, he still chronicles the City. He retains his range of vision, his insights and observations of the characters that people gay life. But this is 1988. There is a different story to tell. This is a book of images and remembrances, and of the sexual exploration that continues even now in the age of AIDS. It draws from essays and articles Holleran has written over the past few years. Here they are, in one place, creating together their own power. Life is essentially episodic. We can only wish for the mythic meanings. Gay life, Ethan Mordden reminds us, is stories, and all these stories are somehow or other about love.

This is self-described plague literature. We need not run from that asessment. It is a point of honesty, and caring, for our generation. Larger meaning and perspective are yeilded only in the specific. There is no generic suffering, no generic sex, no generic personhood. There are only stories, about people, about suffering, about sex. We are unique, in our living and in our dying, in the memories we leave.

"What all the facts and all the accounts of AIDS have somehow failed to deal with," notes Holleran, "is the suffering. Every bar, every dance floor, reminds you eventually of a friend. The memory of friends is everywhere. It pervades the city. Buildings, skyline, corners, have holes in them--gaps, missing persons."

And Holleran remembers. In his essay "My Last Trick", he remembers not only his own last trick ("He wore a black T-

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shirt and faded jeans..."), but tricking itself. "Tricking is the only adventure we can take that does not require a yacht...It is life itself. And it is what we were meant to do...When you first come out, it's how you learn everything about yourself, and the world. It's the way you find your first lover, or at least how much rent someone is paying for a comparable apartment."

Visiting the city after being away, he calls a familiar number. An unfamiliar and gentle voice explains "Cosmo died." Later, winding up the call, he asks, "Do you still get calls like this, asking for Cosmo?" "No, not as often."

Remembrances would be enough to make this book worthwhile. But there is more. Intelligent chapters address quesions of our age. Holleran is not reluctant to put the "sex" back in homosexual. What did it mean? What does it mean now? These are the right questions. Two essays, reminiscent of Sontag's Notes on Camp, list "Notes on Promiscuity", and then, "Notes on Celibacy." His observations on celibacy are especially poigant. One wants to laugh, and probably does, and then wonders why.

> #16...You have more time to yourself; you stay home, you read, eat, write letters, watch TV, make meals in advance, use the Tupperware that's been gathering dust for years on the high shelf, walk down the street with a sense of quiet, go to bed early. You don't find yourself far from home at ridiculous hours, in dark places. You cool out.
>
> #21 Celibacy, like any habit, reinforces itself; the longer you are celibate, the easier it is, the less you want sex...
>
> #22 Or so it seems. On the negative side of celibacy: Celibacy is in fact stressful, and arduous, because it closes off an avenue by which we enter the human community. Celibacy leaves you feeling apart.
>
> #48 Celibacy has no awards dinner. Yet celibacy is like saving stamps--you feel there should be something you can turn it in for...
>
> #65 Celibacy is sanity.
>
> #66 Celibacy is madness.
>
> #67 Celibacy is the future.

Holleran continues this analysis in "Good Sex/Bad Sex." Comparing cities: "In San Francisco you have sex," said a friend, "In New York you wait for people to come." (In Boston?...) Comparing men: "Most of us have a list." And we rate ourselves. "Sex is in a sense an exam one takes over and over again. We all want an "A". Finally, another friend

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offers the definitive answer to what makes good sex. "It's when," he says, "the other person wants you as much as you want them."

This is a compelling book that holds in tension how we live, caught somewhere between the universal and the specific, the larger picture, and our own memories of loss, of living, and of love. This is not easy "in a culture whose solution to grief is grief counseling, whose reaction to catastrophe is stress management and acupuncture." The human scale needs to be restored, even if that invites chaos, loss of order and meaning, which this epidemic inevitably will.

Why aren't we more angry? Where is our anger? Hearing the speaker at the community center on 13th Street, Holleran wonders why too, and recognizes that "AIDS had also induced a kind of shock--a numbness--those first few years; the sense of unreality that occurs to us when our car begins to spin on a patch of ice or collide with another vehicle. What is going on? That is the chief question. One is not angry. One is dumbfounded."

Memory. Our way of coping, of putting things back on the shelf that have fallen and broken apart. It is a human gesture. We find ways to invest meaning where perhaps no objective meaning lies. But then, meaning is, by definition essentially subjective. In the story "Stars," Holleran is in a small Florida town. He leaves the house at night for a walk, after a phone call from New York, to digest the news. "The stars are very white above me...and I think R. belongs to that now, a part again of the universe... he joins a constellation not marked in the maps of the heavens -- of these friends and acquaintances who have entered the past;

He continues his walk, wondering how all this happened. "Could I have lived differently? Been a different kind of homosexual?" Finally he takes away the very meaning he has so carefully placed in the heavens. "...Each evening as I take this walk, it is pure sentimentality to imagine friends who have disappeared as stars twinkling in the night sky above the earth -- in fact, they are just gone." No cheap grace, here. And yet, this whole book, story upon story, memory upon memory, gives meaning to those who have died, and to us who continue. It is we who give them meaning, as they give meaning to us. Their lives continue, in us.

Weaker essays in the collection are those on Henry James, George Santayana, and Charles Ludlam. They are more reviews than essays, and you wonder if they belong here. Yet if you look closely, threads are there, as we look again at celibate or closeted writers. Or see in Ludlam someone who could bring tragedy (in drag) to life, in a culture where "our teeth are flouridated, our theaters air-conditioned."

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Ground Zero. Perhaps only two cities qualify: New York and San Francisco. Perhaps readers who live elsewhere will decide Holleran is "too New York", that plague literature is too limiting a concept. We do so at our peril.

First of all, we are connected to New York by body fluids. New York may finally be only the handwriting on the wall for our community everywhere. But there is something else: we are connected to New York by spirit, by a gay culture, as diaspora remembers Zion.

By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion,
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither,
and let my tongue no longer speak.
Psalm 137

Death illumines life. We face our past as memory, and our future as questions. What of sex? What of promiscuity, celibacy, friendship, love? Sexual exploration must continue as it always has, defining us as we define it.

Ground Zero. Life too brightly seen in a flash. The effects linger. It takes years to assess the damage, to count the dead. If we do not see ourselves at Hiroshima, we are diminished, and we are in danger. If we who are gays of the diaspora do not see in New York something of ourselves, of our present context as well as our future, we are in danger. And, when AIDS touches our lives, as it does over and over again, that is the moment of ground zero in our lives, and we are yet again changed, as changes the world around us.

[Rev. Steve Carson serves as pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Boston. He moved to New York a decade ago to become a homosexual, and lived on the West Side and in Brooklyn until three years ago, when he joined the diaspora. This writing is dedicated to the memory of Bob Russell, who died in July, and whose light illumines gently this night and continues here.]

GAY FATHER DENIED RIGHTS

Chicago...National Gay Rights Advocates announced that a Chicago gay father previously denied all visitation with his four children because of his ex-wife's fear of AIDS will once again be able to visit his family. The public interest law firm agreed to represent the father, after the Judge ruled on April 14 that he could not visit his children because of his "failure to take an AIDS test, as he was an admitted homosexual." The father had not taken the HIV antibody test and had no signs of AIDS. After vigorous representation by NGRA, the children's mother agreed to withdraw her demand, and allowed the father normal visitation privileges.

BETA: NEW TREATMENT NEWSLETTER AVAILABLE; FIRST ISSUE, AZT

The first issue of the Bulletin of Experimental Treatments for AIDS (BETA); published by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, is now in press and will be available soon. Copies can be ordered now (see below).

BETA "is published as an educational resource for people considering experimental treatments for AIDS, ARC and HIV infection". It "reviews available scientific data on AIDS treatments as well as anecdotal information provided by physicians, researchers, people with AIDS and ARC, and individuals infected with HIV". Publication by BETA of information about a treatment does not, of course, imply endorsement of that treatment by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

The first issue, on AZT, gives a readable, comprehensive overview on the use of the drug--including areas of controversy where physicians disagree. About five thousand words in length, the article includes:

*Dosage, toxicity, and side effects;
*Combining AZT with other drugs;
*AZT use by asymptomatic seropositives--pro and con;
*Experiences of people taking AZT;
*Physicians' comments;
*A glossary; and
*A resource guide to experimental treatment info.

Each issue of BETA gets a careful medical review by the Scientific Review Committee of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation.

For a copy of BETA issue #1, call the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, (415) 863-AIDS; or in Northern California call toll-free (800) FOR-AIDS. It's free in San Francisco.

SUNLIGHT HARMFUL TO PERSONS WITH HIV?

The "guerilla clinic" movement, best known for its interest in DNCB as a possible AIDS treatment, has collected and distributed evidence that sunlight or other ultraviolet light might stimulate the growth of HIV and be harmful to persons with HIV infection. Now a new laboratory study, published May 5, 1988 in Nature, greatly increased the concern.

* It has long been known that ultraviolet light can damage or suppress the Langerhans cells of the skin. These cells are an important part of the immune system, and have recently become a focus for intensive research on AIDS.

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* Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control have found the onset of AIDS, as well as almost all opportunistic infections, peak in the summer, when ultraviolet exposure from sunlight is highest.
* The recent article in Nature reported that ultraviolet light increased the activity of HIV genes as much as 150 times in laboratory tests. (An unrelated virus, tested as a control, showed little or no such effect). Exposure to half an hour of direct sunlight increased the HIV activity 12 times. HIV is known to infect Langerhans cells in the skin, which are exposed to ultraviolet light from the sun or other sources.

We asked two AIDS-knowledgeable physicians what they knew about the dangers of sunlight to persons with AIDS, ARC, or asymptomatic HIV infection. Neither had seen the Nature article; both urged normal caution. One warned especially that a number of drugs used by persons with AIDS make the skin much more sensitive to the sun than usual.

For more information, see "A Warning About Sun Exposure From the Guerilla Clinics". This short article has 20 technical references. For a free copy send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Jim Henry, 700 Taylor St., #201, San Francisco, CA 94108.

SURAMIN DISASTER: THE STORY IS TOLD

An article in the July/August issue of San Francisco: The Magazine traces the history of the suramin drug trial in 1985--the first multicenter test of an antiviral AIDS drug in the United States. This disastrous trial killed some of the participants and became a major setback for AIDS research, delaying the progress of clinical trials for perhaps as much as two years or more. It has provided the foundation for justifying the slow pace of trials, restrictions on access to experimental treatments, the movement to accept and romanticize death in the gay community, and the corresponding attitude in government, business, medicine, and the media to write off those already ill or infected, and not bother with the practical clinical research or other public policy commitments designed to save their lives.

Yet for the last several years word of mouth reports circulating among those in the AIDS community close to the suramin trials said that major mistakes in the conduct of the trials had contributed to a disaster that was at least in part avoidable. The current article in San Francisco, by San Francisco Sentinel reporter Charles Linebarger, brings some of this history into public view for the first time.

We learn, for example, that the National Institutes of Health didn't tell the investigators running the trial that adrenal damage was a possible side effect of suramin because

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SURAMIN DISASTER: (Continued)

"any doctor can make a clinical diagnosis of adrenal insufficiency". But the symptoms of that condition can mimic AIDS symptoms, so they were not recognized until too late. If the physicians running the trials had been warned, they would have included a simple test for adrenal damage.

The San Francisco article may help to shake the fatalism which resulted in part from the Suramin trials--a fatalism which has allowed U.S. public policy to accept projections of hundreds of thousands of AIDS deaths with remarkably little effort to avert them.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Rev. Steve Pieters, UFMCC Field Representative for AIDS Ministry, was one of the frist PWA's to take Suramin in 1985-86. Though his cancers went into complete remission within 6 weeks on Suramin, he also suffered the adrenal damage noted in the article, although it was not diagnosed until he was close to death. After taking the drug for 39 weeks, Pieters recovered, and remains in complete remission.

AN AIDS MINISTRY RESOURCE

(A Review by Rev. Jeffrey Pulling, PhD
Office of Ministry Resources, UFMCC)

Religious Education is the quarterly journal of the interfaith organization The Religious Education Association of the U.S. and Canada. Single copies of this journal may be ordered for $9 US from the REA, 409 Prospect St., New Haven, CT 06511-2177.

This journal is written by and for educators/pastors/leaders in mainline churches and synagogues. In this special issue on AIDS, Christian and Jewish educators wrestle with the ethical and pedagogical issues surfacing from AIDS. This particular issue is a good resource to recommend to heterosexually-oriented churches that are trying to responsibly address AIDS. All of the writers have done their "homework" on the enormity of the health crisis and how it will affect all churches and synagogues whether they want it to or not. Many of the writers have done personal reflection on the interrelated theological themes of grace, healing, health, judgment, punishment, sin, sickness, etc. Most of the writers have moved beyond homophobia (fear of homosexuality) but some remain heterosexist through and through - accepting without question the supposed "Biblical view" that male-female sexual relations are God-ordained for all humanity.

Articles in this issue on AIDS include:
(1) "Toward Greater Religious Participation in the Struggle to Combat AIDS" - Charles McCarthy
(2) "Bearing One Another's Burdens" - Abigail Rian Evans

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(3) "The Challenge to the Christian Community" - Michael Duffy
(4) "Safe Sex and Lost Love" - Karen Lebacqz and Deborah Blake
(5) "Learning Fidelity: The Pedagogy of Watchful Care" - Kenneth Vaux
(6) "The Perspective of Jewish Teaching" - Ronald Green
(7) "A Shared Praxis Approach" - James Street
(8) "God's Punishment for Sin?" - Walter Wiest

The article that spoke to and challenged me the most as a gay man ministering among gay and lesbian people was "Safe Sex and Lost Love" by Karen Lebacqz and Deborah Blake. While recognizing safe sex guidelines as an important public norm, they point out the inadequacy of safe sex alone as a Christian ethic because it is based on fear and self-protection, which are sub-Christian. A code of "do's" and "don't's" is obviously inadequate also. Lebacqz and Blake challenge gay men and others to move beyond an emphasis on safe sex only to a sexual ethic based on love, mutuality, vulnerability, truthfulness, and trust.

I was also extremely moved by a comment of Michael Duffy in his essay, "The Challenge to the Christian Community". He asserts that if society does give in to the barbaric impulse to quarantine everyone with AIDS, then the faith community "that seeks to identify with those who are outcast ought to go into quarantine with them." If there were even a handful of mainline-church Christians who would actually undertake such a witness to God's unfailing presence, then I would know beyond a doubt that there is hope for the mainline churches.

SUPPORT THE UFMCC AIDS MINISTRY

(Please send your contribution to the AIDS Ministry in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support!)

FEDERAL COURT DECLARES HIV SEROPOSITIVE TO BE PROTECTED BY FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS LAW

(Los Angeles, CA, July 7, 1988). In a major, precedent-setting ruling, a federal district court in Los Angeles has ruled that a man who was discharged from an inpatient alcohol treatment program because he tested positive for antibodies to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), is covered by federal civil rights law that protects the handicapped from discrimination in all programs or activities receiving federal funds.

Although federal courts have ruled in the past that persons with AIDS are covered by the law, this ruling marks the first time that a federal court has definitively ruled that an HIV seropositive who has no clinical symptoms of disease is covered by the Federal Rehabilitation Act when he or she is treated differently because of fear about HIV transmission.

The suit was brought by the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California and Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund on behalf of a man identified only as John Doe, against Centinela Hospital Medical Center. In January of 1987, Mr. Doe checked into the Hospital's inpatient alcohol and drug rehabilitation program. Upon admittance, he was asked to submit to an HIV antibody test, and when he objected, was assured that the test results would not be used against him. He reluctantly submitted to the test.

Mr. Doe successfully participated in the program for three days, when he was called in to his psychologist's office and told that he had AIDS and would have to leave the program. Mr. Doe did not then have AIDS or any clinical symptoms of HIV infection, and he remains healthy today. Mr. Doe was discharged pursuant to the alcohol rehabilitation program's blanket policy of excluding all HIV seropositives.

"This ruling represents a major victory for the estimated two million HIV seropositive Americans because it says for the first time that discrimination based on fear of contagion will not be tolerated by federal courts," stated Paul Hoffman, ACLISC's legal director.

A trial in the case will be held later this year to determine whether the unique environment of the hospital's inpatient alcohol rehabilitation program would render HIV seropositives unqualified for participation in that program.

RAYTHEON APPEALS LANDMARK DECISION

San Francisco...The Raytheon Company has filed an appeal of a landmark AIDS discrimination case it lost recently in Santa Barbara Superior Court. Judge Patrick L. McMahon held that Raytheon violated California handicap discrimination law by refusing to let John Chadbourne, a gay man, work

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after he was diagnosed with AIDS. It was the first time a California court has held that AIDS is a handicap within the definition of the State's anti-discrimination statute. Judge McMahon has also ordered Raytheon to pay almost $40,000 in attorney's fees to National Gay Rights Advocates and the Employment Law Center of San Francisco for their services in representing the estate of Mr. Chadbourne.

Leonard Graff, NGRA Legal Director, said, "A new legal precedent has been set in a very lengthy, well reasoned judicial opinion. The decision follows prior case law and is in the best interest of the citizens of California. It is not likely to be reversed on appeal."

"Raytheon is stinging," said Jean O'Leary, NGRA Executive Director. "They lost this case before the Fair Employment and Housing Commission, again in Superior Court, and now Raytheon has been ordered to pay attorneys' fees. Filing this further appeal is entirely consistent but utterly irrational, since every major corporation in America has been advised by their attorneys not to discriminate against employees with AIDS."

John Chadbourne worked as a quality control analyst at Raytheon. He was diagnosed with AIDS in December of 1983 and died in January of 1985.

National Gay Rights Advocates and the Employment Law Center of San Francisco are continuing to pursue this case on behalf of Mr. Chadbourne's estate. Peter Laura, of the Law Offices of Leroy Walker, was the trial lawyer.

RESULTS OF SURVEY

Atlanta: Preliminary results from a recent survey of supporters conducted by the AIDS Civil Rights Project, a part of National Gay Rights Advocates, indicate that nearly a third (32%) of those responding said that a candidate's AIDS related positions were the "deciding factor" in determining their vote. Another 62% said a candidate's AIDS-related positions were "critically important," 4% responded "not very important" and for 1% of those responding, AIDS-related issues were not considered.

In response to the question: How many people do you know who have taken unapproved medications for the treatment of AIDS or HIV-related illnesses?, 25% responded that they knew five or more persons taking such treatments, 31% knew fewer than five, and 44% did not know any persons using such treatment.

Jean O'Leary, Executive Director of the 10 year old gay and lesbian rights organization, said: "There are really two messages here. The first is one we've known for a long time: Gay and lesbian voters are smart voters. AIDS is the ultimate litmus test for a candidate; it's truly a life or death issue. I think it is only a matter of time before candidates recognize the near-universal public support for a stronger fight against AIDS, and the issue has virtually no "down side politically. The second message is that while no one knows how many people with AIDS have taken responsibility for their own treatment, clearly vast numbers have done so."

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION RESOLUTION ON AIDS

(Adopted for Study by the General Assembly)
[Final vote at June 1989 General Assembly, New Haven]

BECAUSE the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association have affirmed in covenant to promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; and

BECAUSE we reject the ancient fear and loathing of the human body and sexuality inherent in Calvinist and Augustinian teachings; and

BECAUSE the General Assembly has declared its resolve that health care be made accessible to all, and the the civil rights of persons with AIDS and those who are perceived to be at risk for AIDS be safeguarded;

WHEREAS Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome presents a pandemic of global proportions that threatens the lives of millions of persons indiscriminate of sex, age or sexual orientation; and

WHEREAS governments, religious institutions and other instrumentalities of contemporary society have not spoken or acted with adequate moral or intellectual clarity in this crisis:

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association:

*Rejects superstitious or punitive notions of this or any other disease as a divine punishment or natural retribution for "moral failure," and calls for an intensified search for medical causes of the disease; and

*Calls upon its members, societies and affiliated organizations, and on the religious community at large, to work with compassion, energy, and imagination to care for the suffering, support those who give care, and engage the human issues occasioned by this crisis; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association opposes such infringements upon the dignity and rights of citizens as:

*Mandatory HIV testing, which diverts resources from serious responses to AIDS while posing a serious threat to the confidentiality, rights, and livelihood of those whose test may indicate some exposure to the virus, and produces useless and often misleading or inaccurate information; and

*Discrimination against AIDS patients, against their domestic partners, and against their families and associates and discrimination against those who are thought to be infected or at risk; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association calls upon the governments of the United States and Canada and their component jurisdictions to:

*Initiate immediately a program of forthright education of the general population about the transmission of AIDS, including explicit information about sexual practices that pose high risk of infection, and methods for reducing risk;

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*Acknowledge the severity of intravenous (I.V.) drug abuse and, while increasing efforts to halt it, honor the humanity of IV drug users and re-direct public policy in ways that reduce the threat of AIDS infection among this population, including assessment of the wisdom of distributing clean needles; and

*Expedite medical research and testing of new drugs, and make the full range of health care available to everyone regardless of economic status or means; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Unitarian Universalist Association urges the medical and religious communities to address ethical issues heightened by this crisis, including personal automony, the right to death with dignity, and the roles of the patient, family, partner and medical personnel.

LAMBDA CHALLENGES JOB CORPS'

Lambda has filed a lawsuit in Washington, D.C. Federal District Court in July challenging the Federal Job Corps program's policy of mandatory testing of all Job Corps participants for HIV antibodies, and its blanket exclusion policy which mandates that all HIV seropositives must be discharged from Job Corps residential programs.

The suit charges that the Job Corps discriminated against James Dorsey, a 19 year old gay, black man, by discharging him from the program's Dayton, Ohio residential facility when it learned that Mr. Dorsey tested positive for the presence of antibodies to HIV, the probable causative agent of AIDS. Mr. Dorsey was otherwise qualified for, and enthusiastic about participation in the Job Corps program.

In August of 1987, Mr. Dorsey, a resident of Detroit, Michigan, signed up to the Dayton, Ohio Job Corps residential program. He had hoped that by moving away to the Dayton residential program, he could better himself by living in an environment more conducive to improving his deficient reading and math skills, and to learning an occupation.

After having packed up and moved from Detroit to Dayton, and after a month in the Job Corps, on September 23, 1987, Mr. Dorsey was told by Job Corps officials that he had tested HIV antibody positive, and that pursuant to the Job Corps policy, he could not stay at the Dayton Job Corps facility. They gave him a bus ticket and sent him back to Detroit. He was given no counselling about the consequences of a positive test result, he was not instructed on practicing safe sex, nor was he provided emotional support for receipt of such devastating news.

Neither during the application process, nor during the month Mr. Dorsey lived in the program, had he ever been told that his blood would be tested for HIV antibodies or that if he tested positive he would not be allowed to stay in the residential program, according to suit.

"It is unconscionable that the federal government would take the very kids most in need of counselling and education, and put them back on the streets where in ignorance they may very well engage in activities that will transmit the HIV virus", added Mickey J. Wheatley, Lambda staff Attorney.

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